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WHAT AMERICANS CAN DO FOR RUSSIA.

BY SERGIUS STEPNIAK.

I WANT to tell you a story—the story of a dream, which I may call the dream of my life. It was nine years ago, in Italy, that it took hold of me, and since then my life has been a chase after this dream.

I wrote several books, and I had the rare good fortune to see some trace of their influence upon the views of the thoughtful men of our time. But had these books marked an epoch in literature, I should not care for it half so much as for one step toward the realization of my dream. When I speak of it, people smile and tell me that “it is only a dream.” May be. Sometimes I think so myself. But that does not diminish my desire to gain converts to it. All great things have had an element of dream behind them. The world is—I will not say for dreamers, but—for those to whom the dreamers have given it. There is a strange power in a dream which nothing else can impart. A dream is an idea impersonated, poetized, throbbing with life and enthusiasm. It engrosses the whole of a man—mind, heart, and soul; it stirs up his emotional nature and concentrates all his faculties upon one single object. That is what I have experienced, and wish others to experience too.

In telling my story I shall be personal sometimes, and I do not know whether I should apologize for this. I have found that personal things interest people most, and I wish some one to be interested in, possibly to take some hints from, these pages.

But what is this dream of mine?

This dream is to see one day a new crusade started in the West against the great sinner of the East, the Russian Tzardom; to see an army spring into existence—not a host, but a well-selected army like that of Gideon—composed of the best men of all free nations, with unlimited means at their command, making common

cause with the Russian patriots, fighting side by side with them, each with their appropriate weapons, until that nightmare of modern times, the Russian autocracy, is conquered, and compelled to accept the supremacy of the triumphant democracy.

This is truly a "dream," if not a chimera! the reader will say.

I warned him that so it is. But all dreams, even those which are apparently most incoherent and absurd, have their origin in the realities of life. Mine is no exception, and springs from the natural and, for a Russian, legitimate desire to find some compensation for the special difficulties which surround our struggle for freedom.

Of greater material difficulties I will not speak. Being the last to rebel, we have to face a government which has taken advantage of all the wonders of modern technical invention, as well as of the improvement in the material part of culture, and is far better equipped for fight and resistance than any previous tyranny.

I will not dwell upon the effect of the general character of our country—enormous distances, predominance of agricultural population, smallness of towns, and the like. All this is self-evident.

I prefer to speak here about a circumstance of apparently small importance, but in reality of great moment. In our hard struggle, the soothing, inspiring, and invigorating dream element has been cruelly spoiled for us by fate, or at least awarded with peculiar miserliness.

The English, who were the first to rebel against absolutism and win political freedom, were in this respect the most favored people in the world. Theirs was a political revolution carried on upon a religious basis. They were firmly persuaded that they were fighting for men's happiness, both in this world and in the future. What a scope for noble and exalted dreams in those good Roundheads! Certainly they were the best-cared-for children in the revolutionary family, as the first-born are with the chosen people of Israel.

The French, who followed suit a century later, had their inheritance of dreamland diminished by half. Still, they had no reason to complain, for their share was large enough. Political freedom—Liberty—was for them but a third sister of two other goddesses, Equality and Fraternity. What more would the world need to become an earthly paradise if it had all these three?

But there is no way of dreaming about things which have already become a part of reality. Dreams thrive in the twilight of glimmering hope. The crude prosaic light of day takes off their evanescent glory. The nineteenth century holds fast to political rights and representative government, improving and developing them further, but no longer idealizes them.

Dreams have not forsaken this generation, which, on the contrary, is perhaps the most given to dreams, and therefore the most fervid and impetuous, that history records. But they have fled from modern council chambers as the beautiful native birds of America have fled from the bustle and noise of towns to the woods of the far West. Dreams are hovering now over the new land which the keen-sighted men of our time have already discerned on the horizon—the land of the future coöperative civilization, the promised land of the present competitive, pugnacious, man-a-wolf-to-man civilization.

But those glorious dreams, which are like beacons lighting the high road of progress for advanced nations, were for us Russians like will-o'-the-wisps, which led us astray from the path marked out for us by inexorable history, and caused—for a time at least—deplorable disunions and still more deplorable losses. A whole generation—the best that has ever been born to Russia—was sacrificed before we learned the simple truth that the cart must not be put before the horse, or, in other words, that the social order cannot be changed before people have the means to change it. No country had to pay so dearly for such an elementary doctrine.

We learned at last to postpone our personal inclinations to the needs of the country, and, leaving the future to the future, we accepted for the present the great and modest mission which history has laid upon our generation—the political enfranchisement of the country, the obtaining for Russia of those elementary guarantees of civil freedom and constitutional government which all the nations of Europe already possess.

What can be less romantic and dreamy at the time we live in? Yet we fought, and I dare say fought valiantly, finding our inspiration in love to our country and in faith in the Russian people.

It was a fierce, terribly unequal struggle, which, with the reader's permission, I can compare only to that of the Spartans of Leonidas against the hordes of Xerxes. The whole power of a

mighty empire was arraigned against the small body of revolutionists, who were able to make face against such overwhelming power only thanks to their boundless self-sacrifice and devotion. They struggled as long as they had breath, and they fell almost to a man. As I pass in memory all these friends and companions of mine, I find that two-thirds of them are already dead, some upon the scaffold, some others in prison; the remaining third pining away in the Siberian mines or in the dungeons, waiting for death to release them; only a handful, seven or eight, having escaped the common doom and being now in the lands of the free—one after five, another after ten, the third after fifteen years of prison and sufferings. I think I am the only one who escaped almost scathless—a privilege that needs apology.

I shall be permitted, I hope, without infringing the rules of modesty, to say that this is due, not to my lagging behind, but to my good luck and also to my dream.

In Russia, when a revolutionist gets into trouble with the police, the usual expedient is to change identity and settle in a new place. But after a while this expedient no longer suffices. Then the man will sometimes get smuggled across the frontier and have an “airing” abroad.

I left Russia and returned in this way three times. In 1882 I was taking my “airing” in Italy, and was in correspondence with my St. Petersburg friends about my return to Russia, which I had every reason to believe would be my last. It was the epoch when absolutism and revolution, both having sustained severe blows, were straining their forces in the attempt at mutual destruction. It was impossible to survive long in such a fierce struggle, and one does not come from so far for a short visit.

But whilst the preparations for my return were going on, something unexpected occurred: I wrote a little book—my “Underground Russia,” which appeared originally in Italian. From the very outset it was evident that this little volume had made what is called a hit—had won a good prize in the literary lottery. Hitherto our publications were addressed to a special public—to our revolutionary congregation, I should say. This was the first time that the Russian revolution addressed the world at large, and the question dawned upon me whether it would not be the right thing to do to improve the opportunity.

We were struggling for freedom, which all the civilized na-

tions already enjoy. It was right that the free nations should extend a friendly hand to us : were we not following in the way they have tempted us into by their example ? Besides, does not the Russian autocrat receive from foreign countries all assistance, both material and moral, in maintaining tyranny ? Some of the foreign governments, indeed, go so far as to actually help him in hunting down his rebellious subjects. If the Tzar is helped so energetically by the selfish and reactionary elements of civilization, it is only fair that we should get from the liberty-loving people that support which they can reasonably give.

The thing was right and just, and seemed to me very easily attainable. If the world so awfully misjudged us, it was due entirely to the fact that free scope was allowed to our enemies in calumniating us. We had only to tell the truth, and nothing but truth, about our party and our people, and all would be changed.

It was then that the dream I have mentioned took hold of me.

To conquer the world for the Russian revolution ; to throw upon the scales the huge weight of the public opinion of civilized nations ; to bring to those whose struggle is so hard that unexpected help ; to find without a lever to move the minds of the Russians themselves within—this was the dream which glistened before me.

The opportunity was unique.

Was it worth while to withdraw from the ranks of the combatants one active member and make a writer of him ?

I answered the question in the affirmative, and remained abroad permanently.

In my moments of despondency, which others may call moments of lucidity, whilst thinking of the little which I have done, I question the wisdom of my resolution. But I have never repented of it. All my companions whose memory I cherish would in my place have decided it in the same way.

I have not conquered the world for the Russian revolution. I hardly need say that. What I have succeeded in doing was to make in it a small place for myself. But this was not, indeed, the object of my endeavors. When I think of my present life, of the undisturbed pleasure of my literary pursuits, and of the friendship of so many good, generous men and women, which alone

would suffice to exalt and brighten a man's existence, and when I compare my life with the fate of those with whom I expected to share everything,—well, I cannot help feeling something very different from pleasure.

But whilst I was hammering away at my little anvil with an energy due in great part to my dream, which was always receding, sometimes growing dim, but never disappearing from my horizon, two events of really world-wide importance occurred to revive my hopes and render some attempts at their realization possible.

These two events were, first, the great success of Russian novelists, and, second, the appearance of Mr. George Kennan's articles.

It is not by hatred to the Russian autocracy, but by sympathy with the Russian people, that foreigners have been moved to side with the cause of Russian freedom. There are many governments in Asia and Africa which are even worse than the Russian. Yet who cares about that? If people feel differently with regard to Russia, it is because Russia has ceased to be a mere geographical expression for them. They have got to know something of the Russians as living men and women, and that is the only reason why they can assimilate themselves with the Russians and sympathize with them.

Now, there is certainly nothing which can give such an insight into Russian life and character as the work of our great novelists. They do not describe—they give the living life such as it is; and the crowd of Russian men and women whom they present in spirit, with the completeness and reality of which great artists alone have the secret, have familiarized the world with Russia more than any amount of study or travelling could do. Turgueneff, Tolstoi, Dostoëvsky, have prepared the ground for all that is sympathetic with Russia of the Russians, as distinguished from official Russia.

Mr. George Kennan deals directly with the Russian political question, taking it also from its humane side. It is by presenting the living men and women who are the "victims" of Russian despotism, by showing human tears which are shed and blood which flows, that he called forth throughout all the world an outcry against Russian tyranny.

Of the historical importance of his work I need not speak. From the time of the publication of his articles the Russian

question has held a conspicuous and peculiar place in the thoughts and feelings of modern humanity.

But the Russian question has for the world more than a sentimental interest. The destinies of a state numbering over a hundred and ten million inhabitants must necessarily affect, for good or for evil, the destinies of its neighbors. The fate of Europe will be changed if autocracy is abolished in Russia. Independently of temporary excitement about her, Russia will always attract much attention on the part of those who take interest in the general progress of humanity. She is the youngest in the family of civilized nations, but she has already shown what potentialities are hidden within her. Russia is a country with a great future, and the romance and poetry of great expectations are adding powerfully to the attraction which she exercises.

The total amount of intelligent interest and sympathy which the Russian cause has excited in the world at large is undoubtedly very great ; and, on the whole, it will undoubtedly increase as Russia becomes better known, as her interior convulsions become more apparent, and as the rapid progress of nations all the world over makes the contrast between Russian régime and theirs more shocking.

The question is how to utilize that powerful current of thoughts and emotions to the best advantage of the country which has excited them.

My trip through the States, however short, was sufficient to convince me that there are thousands and thousands of Americans who would wish for nothing better. But how to do it—that is the point.

Ours is a domestic feud. There is no foreign power to uphold tyranny in Russia, as was the case with Italy, Greece, and Hungary. This puts direct assistance on the part of sympathetic foreigners entirely out of the question. The Russians must fight their own battle as best they can. Even diplomatic interference, which has been suggested by some of our friends, seems to me not advisable, except in the Jewish question, which is a peculiar one, the position of Jews in Russia being strictly analogous to that of the Bulgarians and other Christian populations under the Turkish yoke. With regard to the Russian question in general, it is to public opinion pure and simple, and nothing but public opinion, that we appeal. No American will deny our right to ask

for such support, or his countrymen's right to give it to us. But there are very few who will not doubt in their hearts whether such support is worth much for the Russian.

During my journey through the States I had to speak upon this subject with several hundreds of people, and I remember only one man—it was Colonel Robert Ingersoll—who stopped me at the beginning of my explanations and himself told me all the arguments I had in store for proving the great value of foreign agitation. Others, who seemed to admit this on general grounds, were still curious to hear how the thing can be applied to Russia in particular.

But in nine cases out of ten we had to go through regular debates, which were remarkably uniform. The inquirer started, as a rule, from the supposition that the object of the agitation is to reach the Tzar and to give him correct information about his country. This was certainly very *naïve*, and, for a Russian, an amusing way of regarding our efforts. But if my American friends should be offended by my remark, I may console them by saying that the English were just as bad.

It was very natural in both cases. In America, as well as in England, the government is a sort of registering office shaping into laws what public opinion bids. But in Russia we have still to get such a government. At present we have one that knowingly and deliberately resists native public opinion, taking advantage of the fact that material force is still in its hands. It may happen, and it has happened several times, that foreign disapprobation has induced the Russian government to take steps which native public opinion could have never enforced: this is the usual way with despots. But it would be absurd to depend upon such influence. For us, foreign agitation has a value of its own. It is a new weapon in the struggle. Russia, as a state, depends in many ways upon the support of foreign countries. By creating abroad a stream of public feeling hostile to the present government in Russia, we weaken its position as much as by withdrawing a part of its support at home. This is perfectly well understood by the present rulers of Russia. Although always short of cash, the Russian Government spares no expense to keep foreign public opinion on its side. A number of official papers (such as *Le Nord* and *Le Gaulois*) are maintained; all the papers that can be corrupted

are corrupted. The London *Times* and *Daily Telegraph* have informed their readers that the sum of about half a million dollars was assigned in 1890 for this laudable purpose. What better proof could there be of the value of foreign public opinion ?

Besides, the great increase of the cosmopolitan or international element in the intellectual life of the educated people of modern times, especially in Russia, makes foreign agitation a powerful, though indirect, means to stir up public opinion within Russia herself.

I remember that whenever I mentioned this point to Americans they invariably expressed great surprise. It was wonderful enough that the Russians should be affected by what distant foreigners think and say about them, but it seemed to them still more surprising that Russians should know so much about it, for they guessed that papers containing anything unfavorable to the Russian government would hardly be allowed to have free circulation in the empire of the Tzar.

I had to explain that, besides the usual open system of spreading literature which Americans know, there is a system of clandestine circulation unknown to them, but working very well in Russia. Anything that is of great interest to the public is sure to be smuggled, one way or another, in a limited number of copies into Russia. Here the thing is immediately translated into Russian and lithographed or hectographed in hundreds of copies, each copy having hundreds of readers. They are not thrown away or stored up in libraries : they are too precious for the one and too dangerous for the other. They pass from hand to hand until they are worn to rags, and those of their temporary owners who unite sociability with courage will privately assemble their friends in parties of ten, fifteen, or more, and read the interesting thing aloud to them. No more pleasant and "high-class" entertainment can be given in Russia. No work has been so strictly tabooed by the Russian censorship as Mr. George Kennan's articles in *The Century*, and nevertheless there is hardly a man or woman interested in politics who has not read them. The same may be said of some other publications.

News of importance is transmitted from mouth to mouth, and spreads rapidly all over the country. In the summer of 1890 Mr. Smith, a Gladstonian, asked a question in Parliament about the Siberian atrocities. Two months later I received from a friend

living in a small provincial town in the heart of Russia a letter asking me whether it was true that *Mr. Gladstone* asked a question in Parliament upon these atrocities. The news had reached the province quickly enough, though becoming a little magnified by transmission.

Sometimes news of peculiar piquancy is spread openly through the papers published under the censorship, by means of virulent and abusive articles purporting to denounce the thing in question. The public, being used to this, leaves the husk and takes the kernel.

It cannot be expected that anything written by foreigners or for foreigners should tell to the bulk of Russians anything which they did not know already from their own experience or observation. But in all cases what stirs up the Russians so deeply is the fact that there has been interest taken and sympathy expressed for their cause among those nations which the Russians are wont to consider their elders in civilization and freedom. Our people respect to a fault foreign public opinion. Foreign agitation becomes, therefore, to some extent, a substitute for a broader agitation upon the Russian soil, which is impossible under our present political conditions. It is a real power, a source of actual help in our struggle for freedom.

But how can it be carried out? There are many means of influencing and expressing public opinion in free countries—the press, public meetings and demonstrations, protests, and petitions. All these have been employed in the interest of the Russian cause, and all are good in their way. I do not want to impose my views upon any one. If I have some bias against petitioning, it is simply on account of the petitioners themselves. It seems to me a pity that so many good, refined, high-minded men and women should address in deferential terms a man who has connived at and ordered the flogging of women, and other outrages which ought to have excluded him from the companionship of decent people.

Public demonstrations and meetings, if of imposing character, are very valuable in certain exceptional circumstances, and they have the advantage of being noticed, like all public events, in the Russian press—it matters little with what comments.

But our real battering-ram is undoubtedly the press, which is the least obtrusive, the most unimpeachable, and at the same time

the most effective of the weapons we have at our disposal—the daily press in particular, which is the greatest power of modern times.

We have to deal with facts. The influence of our work depends wholly upon the amount of authentic information upon Russian things we put in circulation. Blame receives its poignancy, and sympathy its full effect, when known to be based not upon vague generalities, but upon concrete, authentic, and numerous facts, which have been exposed in all details and open to the test of controversial examination. All this we get by means of the daily press, which has, moreover, the inestimable advantage of telling things whilst they are fresh and recent, and not after they have been covered with the rust of time.

We do not want to flood the daily press with Russian affairs ; this would be bad policy, even if it were in our power to inflict such an inundation upon the reading public. The amount of attention and room given to Russian affairs by the American and English press seems to us amply sufficient. It is the quality of the information that must be improved—its importance and authenticity.

Now, as the only means of getting into permanent communication with modern journalism is to enter into its confraternity, the idea of a newspaper devoted to the Russian cause abroad came naturally to the front.

Such a paper was actually started in England in June, 1890, under the auspices of the English Friends of Russian Freedom, a society headed by a committee of thirty-seven members, including nine members of Parliament, ministers of all denominations, and some of the most influential men and women in England.

Dr. R. Spence Watson, Bensham Grove, Gateshead on Tyne, the chairman of the Liberal Association of Great Britain, is the founder and president of this society ; Edward R. Pease (Hyde Park Mansions, London) is its secretary.

The paper is *Free Russia*, published simultaneously in London and New York (51 *Tribune* Building).

In April last a society similar to the English one was founded in Boston on the initiative of Mrs. Julia Ward Howe, Colonel T. W. Higginson, Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain), and William Lloyd Garrison. In a few weeks it received the adhesion of a number of persons, among whom were men of such eminence as

John G. Whittier, James Russell Lowell, Phillips Brooks, F. D. Huntington, Lyman Abbott, and many others, without speaking of Mr. George Kennan, who was one of the first to join the society and who has promised his full and hearty support. Mr. Francis Garrison, of Boston (4 Park Street), is its treasurer ; Mr. Spring is its secretary.

From the reception which the movement met with in New York and other important cities, it is easy to foresee that the new society promises to become within a short time a national one, with scores of branches in all the principal cities of the States.

It is quite possible that at the next anniversary of the London society a new society of the same nature may be organized in Germany, then in Austria, Italy, and—at the first clearing of the political horizon from the mist of Russian alliance—in France.

This course is the right one, and the beginning is excellent. The existence of such a paper and of such a league of eminent men, many of whom are known and respected in Russia, will constitute an impressive and permanent demonstration in favor of Russia's freedom. But I wish some one would look beyond the immediate issue, and see, behind the paper, the vast movement of which it must be the interpreter.

A special paper devoted to Russian interests can never command more than a few thousand subscribers. Its influence will be certainly much greater than the mere number of its subscribers may suggest. But to become a real power in the struggle, to become a source from which papers commanding millions of readers will draw their information, this paper must have means exceeding those it can get by ordinary subscription. We can avail ourselves now only of information obtained gratuitously, or almost gratuitously. But there is much more which could be taken advantage of. Every press man knows what a well-organized bureau of correspondents can do.

The society which stands behind the paper is, therefore, more important than the paper. The paper is the tool, a pick-axe, very well adapted for excavating the truth, but the society is the hand holding this tool, and the amount of useful work depends upon the strength of the hand.

There is a law of equivalents and of conservation of energy in social life, as well as in mechanics. The light which has been thrown upon Russia's inner conditions has generated sympathy.

This sympathy can be again converted into light, which will be the exact equivalent of the material means spent upon it.

Hitherto we have been able to throw into the outer darkness of the Russian empire a few burning torches, so to speak, which have lit up a certain piece of ground, showing the monsters hidden there. This has not been entirely useless. But we could do much more. In modern warfare artificial lights have been used to light up the enemy's camps by night, the light from a powerful source being thrown to a distance by means of big reflectors. It seems to me that the American and English friends of Russian freedom can do, if they choose, something analogous with regard to the Russian autocracy. By combining our efforts we could break the darkness in which its deeds are wrapped, and keep upon it permanently the glowing, all-pervading light of publicity.

Will the Americans or the English care to do this?

I do not know. I only know that there is a way to effectively help the Russians, and I have shown it.

Many times I have heard Americans say that they consider it a sacred duty of the free nations to help those who are still struggling for their freedom. I am certainly the last man to contradict such a doctrine. But there are duties so lofty that their fulfilment can be hoped for, but never claimed.

We are prepared for everything. If there is no hope of advancing the cause of freedom in Russia otherwise than through rivers of blood and over the corpses of Russia's most devoted children, we will accept this too. But looking upon the matter as objectively as I possibly can, it seems to me that there is no foundation for so gloomy a view.

There is no cause involving any humanitarian interest which has not thriven in our generous age, and the cause of Russia is the cause of one hundred and ten millions of men, who all suffer in their different ways—peasants and Jews, educated people and ignorant. No cause is greater and more deeply ingrained in the thought and feeling of modern humanity.

The idea of the brotherhood of nations is no longer a dream of a few idealists. It is one of the realities of modern life and the foundation of our hopes. Nations are united much more closely nowadays than they were fifty, or even twenty-five, years ago. Everywhere I have happened to pass I have met numbers of American men and women to whom the sufferings of Siberian

exiles and prisoners, and the horrors of which they constantly hear from distant Russia, have been the source of mental pain as deep and real as if caused by something happening at their doors. There are thousands who feel thus in the towns and cities of the States. They could start a movement which, by its usefulness, magnitude, and character, would be the glory of the enlightened century which renders it possible. They would certainly start such a movement *if only they could believe* that their efforts would be, not a waste of energy, not mere sentimental outpourings, but a real work for Russian enfranchisement, a real means of strengthening the party of freedom and weakening the party of despotism.

This seems to me the gist of the question. There is no limit to the extensions of our work and of the good that can be done if people only come to believe in it.

Now, this belief can be imparted if there are a few men or women who will study the matter carefully, with minds unprejudiced by its apparent unwontedness, and themselves come to believe in a plan which, for the sake of practical people, I will still call a dream.

S. STEPNIAK.